

## The Unknown

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Summary: A small but significant conversation between John and Cortana. How did she know he was a man who kept his promises?

## The Unknown

"Going somewhere Chief?" Cortana asked, suddenly appearing on the holoprojector in John's room as he was getting ready to leave. He turned to her surprised and slightly embarrassed. She usually kept tabs on everything, this was one of the first times where Cortana might not know what was going on. He found that he was glad she didn't know where he was going. It was bad enough that Johnson was making him go, he didn't need Cortana teasing him about it.

"I thought you of all people, Cortana, would know the events of today." John responded dryly, earning a look from his friend.

"Well sorry I can't live up to your expectations, but I've been rather busy." she retorted tartly, folding her arms across her chest.

"Lord Hood has had me monitoring for any slipspace anomalies ever since we got back from halo. Of course, this only takes up a fraction of my processing power, but I want to be sure. Sorry I haven't been paying more attention." She paused then, smiling slightly as she moved her hands to her hips. John was taken aback at her response. Cortana was becoming so... different, more so every day. She was the only person he felt relatively comfortable talking to on the station. It as almost as if she was human.

"So, an award ceremony, huh?" Cortana said sounding slightly amused, speaking after a moment of thought.

"Doesn't sound like anything you would go to out of free will. Is there any particular reason you're going?" She mused, staring at him

with a slightly mischevious look in her eyes.

"I thought you had to focus your attention on those scans." John muttered, turning towards the door. Yes, he wasn't too particularly thrilled about going. He would rather go over the improvements to the MJOLNIR armor and familiarize himself with them, but Johnson had asked him to go. John wanted to leave, but Cortana wasn't having that.

"And I thought I told you I can do that as well as multiple other things. Besides, getting the information is quick and easy. You'd be surprised how much research I can do on something I'm interested in." She said easily, enjoying his slight discomfort.

It was clear to John that she wasn't going to let this go. He thought about leaving Cortana for a moment, then discarded the idea. She'd just keep questioning him through the comm channels until he broke.

"I have an obligation." John replied stubbornly.

Cortana stared at him expectantly, waiting for the rest.

He sighed, hating being on the spot. Especially when it came to this AI.

"I promised Johnson I would go. I hate publicity, which is why I was reluctant, but he said no cameras. I figured I should do him a favor."

Cortana stared at him with interest and amusement as she sifted through the preparations for today, silently wondering how John would react when he found out that there would be cameras. She decided to let him discover that fact on his own, right now Cortana was much more interested in learning something new about this stoic, elusive super soldier.

"So are you a man who keeps his promises?" She asked, her voice sounding slightly teasing.

John sighed once more. She would carry the subject, she was way too stubborn drop it.

"I wouldn't be going if I weren't." John murmured, breaking off from the conversation. This was getting a little too personal. Besides, he had to go get his new armor and meet Johnson.

Cortana watched silently as John hurried from the room, thinking.

There was a lot more to this man than just a perfect soldier. He was human, and had human emotions. She wondered if John knew that, or if she would have to tell him herself. The thought almost made Cortana laugh out loud.

An AI, explaining humanity to a human? It would be comical. He wouldn't understand. Hell, she hardly understood herself. But lately, something within herself had changed. It was almost as if she was developing actual human emotions. They weren't like her normal programmable responses, something she could control, choose to shut

off when they became a liability. These were uncontrollable and unfathomable. Cortana had absolutely no idea how to react anymore. Things should be simple, logical. But emotions were clouding her thoughts, almost corrupting her mind. And it seemed as though the more time she spent with John, the stronger and more uncontrollable her emotions became.

She had mused over this theory before, but the only answers she could come up with were impossible. Or should have been, under normal circumstances.

Some sort of ripple in normal space showed up on the scans, pulling Cortana from her cocoon of thought. There were so many of them today already. She would have to inform Lord Hood immediately.

The ceremony was taking place now, but this was important. It was becoming clear that the covenant were coming sooner than expected from what the scans were telling her.

Cortana had to wait a moment before she was given permission to speak, impatient.

"Go ahead Cortana." Hood said, turning his attention away from the heroes in front of him and to the holoprojector.

Cortana's avatar appeared as she relayed her information.

"Another whisper sir. Near IO, we have probes en route."

She shifted her attention to the Spartan in his new green armor as Hood apologized for having to shorten the ceremony, her thoughts jumbled slightly. She had already seen the armor through the station's cameras, as well as learned about it from the top secret ONI files. But it was something else to see John wear it himself. Cortana's emotions got the best of her as she looked at him, and for the first time since her creation spoke without thinking.

"You look nice." She said honestly, smiling as she did. Of course, his expression was unreadable through his reflective visor, but she could have sworn he straightened slightly at her words.

"Thanks." he responded quickly, turning his attention back to Lord Hood.

Several slipspace portals captured Cortana's attention as covenant battle cruisers and to carriers came out of them. But there was hardly enough to apply serious force, why so small of numbers? By her count there were only fifteen.

She sounded the alarm and quickly turned to explain the situation.

The day had just gotten very interesting.

"Just so you know, there are quite a few Elites guarding the bomb." Cortana warned through a private comm channel to the Chief.

"You may have to get creative."

"Roger that." He responded quietly as he made his way forward through

the air lock doors. Cortana watched silently as John went to work, watching the timer on the bomb as its numbers shrank.

Finally all the enemy soldiers in the room were eliminated, she appeared on the holoprjector infront of the bomb. Not a lot of time left.

"Me. Inside your head. Now." She said urgently as Johns came closer. Silently he reached out his hand and uploaded her into his systems.

Quickly the Spartan reached out his hand and touched the detonator controls. Cortana put in the command that would stop the timer, almost sighing in relief as it stopped counting down.

"How much time was left?" John asked anxiously. Cortana stared at the numbers again and decided what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

"You don't want to know." Was her only response, and he decided to take her word for it. John stared at he bomb for a moment, pondering a dangerous thought. It might just work, but he would need Hood's permission in order to do it.

"Sir, permission to leave the station." He asked, waiting silently as Cortana wondered why he would want to leave and just how he would do it.

"For what purpose master chief." Hood responded, sounding slightly distracted.

"To give the covenant back their bomb." John said dangerously, waiting once more.

Suddenly his plans became clear to Cortana, reckless and harebrained. As she started to calculate the possibility of actually hitting the target and making it safely away and to a ship, she stopped herself. He had defied the odds so many times before, why couldn't he do it again? A slight tension hung in the air until they received a response.

"Permission granted."

Silently, John grabbed the seemingly pointless spikes attached to the bomb and dragged it to the elevator, pressed down for the airlocks, waiting for the innevitable. He knew Cortana couldn't stay silent for long.

"I know what you're thinking, and it's crazy." She warned him, making sure he knew what he was getting into before he did this.

"So," he said, indifferent. It hardly mattered. He knew how crazy it was the moment he had thought of it.

"Stay here." John offered. Just because he chose to do this, didn't mean she had to come to. But he had a feeling his offer was pointless.

There was no way she was staying behind. Cortana wasn't willing to let him perform such a scheme alone, and she was the only one who

could come. Besides, everything was already so crazy one more thing to add to the collection would hardly matter. She was getting used to it.

"Unfortunately for us both," she responded, and John knew his hunch had been correct.

"I like crazy."

John smiled slightly from behind his visor, sort of grateful for the company. He had gotten used to having Cortana with him.

He pulled the bomb from the elevator, placed it in the open and started through the glass, waiting for the right moment. As soon as he saw his chance he ran back to the airlock controls, pressed the switch and grabbed the handle, waiting.

Cortana had to ask. She had to know what he would do if his luck finally ran out.

"Just one question." She said innocently and the airlock doors opened.

"What if you miss?"

John steeled himself, ready for anything.

"I won't."

With that he pulled the lever, waited until the bomb was close enough and grabbed hold, jumping into the unknown.

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file.